

Aid to farmers scanty, admits Maharashtra minister

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Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, 2006-12-16 19:30:39 (IndiaPRwire.com)

Admitting that the Rs.1,500 per hectare aid announced for distressed cotton growers was inadequate, a Maharashtra minister Saturday cited the state's financial constraints as the main reason for it.

Public Works Minister Anil Deshmukh said the aid, announced at the end of the legislature's winter session here Friday, was the best the government could come up with.

The minister is a member of a cabinet sub-committee on cotton representing Vidarbha's Katol constituency in the state assembly.

The sub-committee had unanimously recommended an aid of Rs.3,000 per hectare but the cabinet reduced it to half, which alone would entail an additional burden of Rs.5,000 million on the state exchequer, he said.

'We (member-ministers from Vidarbha in the sub-committee) pressed hard for a substantial amount of aid during all the meetings and compelled other members and chairman Harshvardhan Patil (marketing minister) to make the unanimous recommendation, but the consideration of the state's financial constraints prevailed in the end,' Deshmukh told IANS.

Bharatiya Janata Party legislator Devendra Fadnavis, however, pointed to 'indiscriminate non-essential expenditures' like purchase of an aircraft worth Rs.380 million and an unjustifiable tax exemption of Rs.1,000 million on the lottery tickets sale.

He deplored that the government ignored the recommendations of four studies that it had itself sponsored.

'The hike in the prices of farm produce (cotton in this case) was recommended by the National Commission for Farmers and the Planning Commission team led by Adarsh Mishra as also by the **Tata Institute of Social Sciences** and the Yashwant Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA),' Fadnavis said.

Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti chief Kishor Tiwari has also flayed the 'peanuts' that the state has offered the farmers 'after more than 1,200 of them committed suicide in the last 18 months'.

- Indo Asian News Service